

THE WHITE HOUSE
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White House Honors “Champions of Change” for Engaging the Next Generation of Conservation Leaders

WASHINGTON, DC – [On Tuesday, March 18, 2014](#), the White House will honor fourteen local heroes who are “Champions of Change” for their efforts to engage communities and youth in environmental stewardship and conservation. Through innovative approaches, they are creating opportunities for the next generation of Americans to take part in outdoor recreation and physical activity.

In 2010, President Obama created the [America’s Great Outdoors Initiative](#) to encourage Americans, particularly children, to enjoy our country’s rivers and waterways, farms and forests, and local and national parks. As part of this initiative, the President created the 21st Century Conservation Service Corps to establish quality jobs, career pathways and service opportunities for youth and veterans. Building on this, Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell recently launched an effort to inspire millions of young people to play, learn, serve and work outdoors, through forming outdoor recreation partnerships in 50 cities to create new outdoor play opportunities for more than 10 million young people; providing educational opportunities to at least 10 million of the nation’s K-12 student population annually; engaging 1 million volunteers annually on public lands; and providing 100,000 work and training opportunities to young people, including through public-private partnerships.

President Obama believes we have a moral obligation to our future generations to leave them a planet that is not polluted or damaged. That is why in June of 2013 he launched a comprehensive [Climate Action Plan](#) to cut carbon pollution, and prepare our communities and ecosystems for the impacts of climate change we are already seeing. Engaging the next generation of conservation leaders is a key component of the Administration’s work to connect young people with the outdoors, confront the challenges of climate change, better manage our public lands and waters, and benefit the environment, public health, and the economy.

The Champions of Change program was created as an opportunity for the White House to feature individuals doing extraordinary things to empower and inspire members of their communities.

The event is closed to press but will be live streamed on the White House website. To watch this event live, visit www.whitehouse.gov/live at 9:00 am EST on March 18. To learn more about the White House Champions of Change program, visit www.whitehouse.gov/champions.

**Benjamin Blonder, Co-founder of University of Arizona’s Sky School
Tucson, AZ**

Dr. Benjamin Blonder co-founded the University of Arizona’s Sky School, a residential science school that provides inquiry-based environmental education on a campus located in the heart of

the Coronado National Forest. Because of his efforts, each year hundreds of K-12 students, primarily from Title I schools, are now able to conduct independent research while exploring the unique ecology, geology, and astronomy resources of the region. These experiences are key for inspiring and preparing a more diverse next generation of scientists and conservation leaders. Benjamin's vision for the Sky School was inspired by his AmeriCorps service in central Idaho at the McCall Outdoor Science School, a NSF-supported teaching fellowship in a Tucson public school, and his long-term volunteer leadership with The Sierra Club's Inner City Outings program, which provides opportunities for urban youth to experience nature. He recently received his PhD in ecology and evolutionary biology from the University of Arizona.

**Jon Brito, Kupu RISE Program Fellow
Kahului, HI**

Jon Brito served three AmeriCorps terms with Kupu's Hawaii Youth Conservation Corps from 2008 to 2013, as a team member, team leader, and a year-long intern. During these terms Jon engaged the local youth and community members on the rural island of Moloka'i in critical environmental community service and indigenous cultural practices. Jon's commitment to serving the island's land and people has helped protect and restore countless endangered native Hawaiian species and habitats, perpetuate native Hawaiian knowledge and culture, and has inspired other local youth and community members to take an active part in the conservation movement on Molokai. Currently, Jon is a fellow in Kupu's RISE Program, where he is finding ways to make agri-businesses more energy efficient. He is also completing the Electronic and Computer Engineering Technology Program at the University of Hawaii's Maui Campus.

**Anthony Ciocco, Crew Leader for the Ancestral Lands Program at Southwest
Conservation Corps
Navajo Nation, Durango, CO**

Anthony Ciocco is a Crew Leader for the Ancestral Lands Program at Southwest Conservation Corps leading ecological restoration crews on the Navajo Nation. Under Anthony's leadership his crews of local Native youth work to rebuild damaged eco-systems and build trails to provide access to the outdoors for local communities. In his work he has accomplished extremely challenging and important conservation projects, while at the same time giving the crew members a deep and hard-earned sense of accomplishment enabling them to move forward in their professional and personal lives. He strongly believes that reclaiming well-being in our Native communities is a highly integrative process including our landscapes, cultures, languages, and our mental and physical health. Anthony, of the Mvskoke tribe, co-founded a non-profit devoted to restoration of traditional language and culture. He has also worked extensively in restoring traditional food systems and received the Live Real Food Fellowship. The University of Colorado Public Interest Internship Experience (PIIE) awarded Anthony a grant to fund his work with the Indigenous Training and Resource Council.

**Stacie Gilmore, Co-Founder & Executive Director, Environmental Learning for Kids
Denver, CO**

Stacie Gilmore co-founded Environmental Learning for Kids (ELK) in 1996 to provide pathways to science and natural resource careers for urban youth, youth of color, and other young people with limited access to these opportunities. Under Stacie's direction as the Executive Director for the last 18 years, ELK has transformed the lives of thousands of youth through science education, stewardship projects and outdoor experiences. Her lifelong dedication to educate youth through science and conservation experiences is embedded in all programs and activities, which further students' understanding and attitudes toward science, the outdoors, their communities, college, and careers. Stacie works to transform youth by empowering them with increased academic skills, civic and community leadership, environmental stewardship, and employment opportunities.

**Andy Hart, Executive Director of Nevada Outdoor School
Winnemucca, NV**

Andy Hart has served as Executive Director at Nevada Outdoor School (NOS) for the past five years. NOS, a 501(c)(3) non-profit, based in rural northern Nevada, strives to inspire the next generation of conservation leaders through a variety of inquiry-based science and experiential outdoor education initiatives. By working to ensure NOS programs are offered for free or reduced rates, thousands of under-served Nevada youth are able to benefit from classroom lessons, field trips, summer camps and other programs each year. A strong partnership network, including federal land management agencies allows students to connect authentically with the vast public lands in Nevada. Nevada Outdoor School's AmeriCorps program additionally offers citizens the opportunity to engage in service and explore natural resources careers in various positions including Naturalists for NOS education programs. Andy first fell in love with America's public lands as an engineer working in Nevada's goldfields and also sits on the Bureau of Land Management's Sierra Front - Northwestern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council.

**Bill Hodge, Director of Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards Program
Tellico Plains, TN**

Bill Hodge serves as the Director of the Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards (SAWS) program. Since starting in 2010, the SAWS program has quickly grown not only in capacity to assist the United States Forest Service in serving and stewarding federally designated wilderness areas across five states, it has also become a constituency building effort to engage, inspire and deploy public lands stewards from a new and more diverse generation. Through direct engagement in on the ground stewardship for designated wilderness, the SAWS program has connected hundreds of new public lands stewards to places and landscapes they may never have experienced. In 2013 the SAWS program employed twenty-three seasonal employees, which supported over eight-thousand volunteer hours across seventeen wilderness areas and five National Forests.

**Na'Taki Osborne Jelks, Co-founder of Atlanta Earth Tomorrow® Program, National
Wildlife Federation
Atlanta, GA**

Na'Taki Osborne Jelks is a nationally-recognized leader in engaging urban communities and youth of color in environmental stewardship through hands-on watershed and land restoration initiatives, environmental education, and training. In 2001, Na'Taki co-founded the Atlanta Earth Tomorrow® Program, National Wildlife Federation's multi-cultural, youth environmental education and leadership development program that engages urban youth in investigating causes of environmental challenges, helps them connect to nature, fosters their leadership of youth-led community action projects, promotes civic engagement, and nurtures leadership skills for building personal environmental stewardship.. The Atlanta Earth Tomorrow® Program has directly reached over 2,500 youth and was recently selected as a 21st Century Conservation Service Corps (21CSC) member organization. In addition to her work with the National Wildlife Federation, Na'Taki is Board Chairperson of the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance (WAWA), a community-based organization that recently launched the Atlanta Children's Forest Network (ACFN) in partnership with the USDA Forest Service and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to engage Atlanta youth and families in environmental education, service learning, and outdoor physical activity.

**Carol Leone, Founder and Director, Teens To Trails
Edgecomb, ME**

Seven years ago, Carol Leone founded an organization called Teens To Trails based on a simple, replicable concept: If every high school in Maine offered an Outing Club program, every student would have access to safe, healthy & fun outdoor experiences just at the time in their life when they need positive choices the most. Since that time, Carol has lead the Teens To Trails movement to increase the opportunities for Maine teens to experience the out-of-doors through a variety of programs that promote and support high school Outing Clubs. Teens To Trails began with one individual, grew in size and scope through the efforts of a dedicated group of volunteers, and has transitioned to a growing membership organization supporting Outing Clubs across the State.

**Parker Liautaud, Student, Willis Resilience Expedition
New Haven, CT**

Parker Liautaud is a polar adventurer and climate change campaigner from Palo Alto, California. He has undertaken three expeditions to the North Pole and one to the South Pole. His expeditions aim to inspire people across generations to take action on climate change. In November-December 2013, he led the Willis Resilience Expedition, an Antarctic expedition during which he and his team undertook field work for three climate research programs, then trekked over 350 miles to the South Pole without external assistance, setting two world records in the process. The project included a 16-episode live show, dedicated to communicating the impacts and science of climate change, which featured debates and discussions with experts from various fields as well as live video from Antarctica. Through his expeditions, he has partnered with scientific institutions such as the International Atomic Energy Agency and GNS New Zealand to conduct climate research, and has worked closely with the United Nations Foundation and the Yale Climate and Energy Institute on the communication of climate science. Parker is an ambassador for One Young World. He studies Geology & Geophysics at Yale University.

**Stephen Lockhart, Chair of the NatureBridge
Oakland, CA**

Stephen H. Lockhart, MD, PhD, a board-certified anesthesiologist, is a Vice President and Regional Chief Medical Officer for Sutter Health, a not for profit system of hospitals, physician organizations and research institutions in Northern California. A Rhodes Scholar, he obtained his Masters degree in Economics from Oxford University, and M.D. and Ph.D. degrees from Cornell. For the last six years, he served as Chair of the Board of Directors of NatureBridge, an organization that provides environmental science education to 30,000 young people annually in the National Parks. An avid climber and backpacker, he has a long-standing passion for providing environmental science education and introducing our National Parks to an increasingly diverse population. Dr. Lockhart also serves on the Boards of the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), REI and was previously a member of the National Parks Second Century Commission, an independent group of respected leaders and experts who convened to articulate a vision for the second century of the National Park Service and whose recommendations to Congress, the Administration, and the American people were published in September, 2009.

**Tristan Persico, Veteran Outreach Coordinator, Montana Wilderness Association
Missoula, MT**

Tristan Persico, a former United States Air Force Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technician and Afghanistan combat veteran, serves Montana's armed forces community as the Veteran Outreach Coordinator for the Montana Wilderness Association. Tristan provides opportunities for veterans to share wilderness experiences, tell stories around the campfire, and be with peers who understand what they have been through. In addition to his work with the Montana Wilderness Association, Tristan is a full time college student pursuing a degree in Parks, Tourism, and Recreation Management at the University of Montana. Tristan and his family live in Missoula, Montana, where they enjoy spending time in Western Montana's pristine wilderness.

**William Spitzer, Vice President for Programs, Exhibits and Planning, New England
Aquarium
Boston, MA**

William Spitzer, Ph.D., is Vice President for Programs, Exhibits and Planning at the New England Aquarium. He is responsible for oversight of exhibit design, visitor experience, volunteer, and education programs as well as institutional strategic planning. The Aquarium is redefining what it means to be an aquarium: combining education, entertainment and action to address the most challenging problems facing the ocean. Through a wide variety of educational programs and conservation initiatives, we make a lasting impact globally. We work to develop the next generation of ocean stewards through a variety of programs that combine learning, service, and stewardship while focusing on key issues such as climate change and habitat protection. These efforts include immersive experiential learning and citizen science opportunities for youth; workplace learning and career development for teens; volunteer service and stewardship programs for adults; and interpretation and communication training for staff. All involve a range of collaborations and capacity building initiatives with other organizations in Boston, New England, and across the United States.

**Carrie Vollmer-Sanders, Director, Western Lake Erie Basin Project, The Nature Conservancy
Angola, IN**

Carrie Vollmer-Sanders is the Director of the Western Lake Erie Basin Project for The Nature Conservancy. Carrie leads the Conservancy's efforts to promote a healthy Lake Erie by working with farmers, agribusinesses, researchers, government agencies, and conservation groups to improve nutrient management and drainage practices. With Carrie's leadership, this broad group has developed a voluntary, third-party certification program in which farmers' fertilizer and crop advisers can be recognized for their efforts to improve water quality. The 4R Nutrient Stewardship Certification Program was created to be a consistent, recognized program for the agricultural retailers that ensures social, environmental and economic 4R nutrient sustainability goals (applying the Right source of fertilizer at the Right rate at the Right time, in the Right amount) are adopted which lead to long term positive impacts on water quality in Lake Erie. Prior to joining The Nature Conservancy Carrie served as the Agricultural Ecology Specialist for Michigan Farm Bureau. Carrie farms with her husband and two sons in northwest Ohio and live in Angola, Indiana.

**Pam Hess, Director of Youth Engagement and Outdoors Rx Program, Appalachian Mountain Club
Waltham, MA**

Pam Hess is the Director of Youth Engagement and leads the Outdoors Rx program at the Boston-based Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), the nation's oldest outdoor recreation and conservation organization. Outdoors Rx represents AMC's collaborative partnership with the healthcare community to provide free, dedicated resources for prescribing regular outdoor physical activity to youth, especially underserved individuals. Outdoor activity has been shown to improve the physical and mental well-being of youth while also offering a greater appreciation for the natural world. Once Outdoors Rx prescriptions are written, AMC helps families "fill" these prescriptions by providing free, guided outdoor programming in their communities several times a week. Outdoors Rx is currently being piloted with pediatric healthcare practitioners in Greater Boston communities with plans for expansion. Pam has held a leadership role in youth outdoor education at AMC for the past 11 years.